

### Book Review

## Trihartono, A., & Putri, E. A. L. (2025). *Diplomasi Gelombang Korea (Hallyu): Aktor, Media, dan Dampak*. KHD Production. 187 pp.

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#### Abstract

This article reviews *Diplomasi Gelombang Korea (Hallyu): Aktor, Media, dan Dampak*, analyzing Hallyu as a strategic soft power instrument. The book systematically maps the ecosystem from historical roots to the digital 3.0 era, highlighting the synergy between state and private actors. While offering a comprehensive chronological narrative, this review interrogates its state-centric framework. By integrating “success without design” and non-state agency perspectives, the article challenges the portrayal of the government as an omnipotent architect. Furthermore, it explores the evolving role of fandoms as independent referees and the causal link between exploitative business models and Hallyu’s global competitiveness. Ultimately, it emphasizes the need for a more nuanced understanding of ethical contradictions within contemporary cultural diplomacy.

**Keywords:** *Cultural diplomacy; Hallyu; South Korea; Soft power, non-state actors.*

#### Abstrak

Tulisan ini mengulas buku *Diplomasi Gelombang Korea (Hallyu); Aktor, Media dan Dampak* yang membedah fenomena Hallyu sebagai instrumen soft power. Buku ini secara sistematis memetakan ekosistem Hallyu dari akar sejarah hingga era digital 3.0, dengan menyoroti sinergi antara pemerintah dan aktor swasta. Meskipun menyajikan narasi kronologis yang komprehensif, ulasan ini menginterogasi kerangka berpikir yang berpusat kepada negara. Dengan mengintegrasikan perspektif “*success without design*” agensi non-negara, artikel ini menyanggah penggambaran pemerintah sebagai arsitek tunggal yang mahakuasa. Lebih lanjut, ulasan ini mengeksplorasi peran fandom sebagai “*referee*” independen serta keterkaitan antara model bisnis eksploitatif dengan daya saing global Hallyu. Terakhir, tulisan ini menekankan perlunya pemahaman yang lebih bernuansa mengenai kontradiksi etis didalam diplomasi budaya kontemporer

**Kata Kunci:** *Diplomasi budaya; Hallyu; Korea Selatan; Soft Power, aktor non-negara.*

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## Introduction

The book titled *Diplomasi Gelombang Korea (Hallyu); Aktor, Media dan Dampak* encompasses a comprehensive study that deconstructs the Korean Wave, or Hallyu phenomenon. This work provides an in-depth analysis of Hallyu's transition, from a mere popular cultural trend to a structured instrument of diplomacy. The author's main conjecture clearly states that this phenomenon is not just a cultural coincidence. Instead, Hallyu is a manifestation of a consciously designed soft power strategy supported by a complex multi-actor ecosystem.

Adapting the theoretical framework of soft power pioneered by Joseph S. Nye, Jr., this book positions popular culture as a major resource that enables nations to influence and or shape worldwide preferences (Nye, 2008). In this context, the author convincingly positions Hallyu as a strategic asset that has successfully shifted South Korea's national image from that of a war-torn nation to an epicenter of global cultural innovation.

While this book successfully fills a significant gap in Indonesia-language literature by discussing Hallyu from an international relations perspective, this review argues that its state-centric framework requires further "interrogation". Specifically, we contend that the book's portrayal of the government as a master "architect" risks overlooking the organic, non-state dynamics that are central to Hallyu's global legitimacy and its inherent ethical contradictions. By providing a more nuanced evaluation, this review aims to contribute to the broader discussion on cultural diplomacy and the evolving agency of non-state actors in the digital era.

## Discussion

The primary strength of this book lies in its systematic and logical structure, which effectively maps the Hallyu ecosystem from its historical roots to the digital 3.0 era. Unlike many works that focus exclusively on modern pop icons, this book provides a comprehensive

chronological narrative by tracing the pre-Hallyu period, including cultural resistance during Japanese colonialism and post-war American cultural adaptation. This depth is essential for understanding how the modern Korean creative industry was formed as a strategic asset to shift South Korea's image from a war-torn nation to a global cultural epicenter.

Despite its strengths, the book exhibits certain analytical imbalances and narrow perspective that require critical expansion.

First, the narrative consistently portrays the South Korean government as the central "architect" that masterminded Hallyu's global success through deliberate strategic policies. This state-centric view, while historically grounded in the post-1997 era, tends to overlook the "success without design" perspective. As argued by Kim (2016), Hallyu was essentially an unintended phenomenon born from a coincidental coupling of five independent factors: the competitiveness of Korean culture industries, political-economic changes in East Asia, entrepreneurship, fragmentary governmental support, and global digital networks. No single actor, including the state, intentionally planned the global boom. Furthermore, while the book highlights governmental design, presidential speeches between 1998 and 2014 suggest that the government's role was more of a responsive facilitator that reinterpreted transnational cultural content as national products for "national branding" after it had already gained organic momentum (Kim & Jin, 2016). The state is perhaps more accurately described through the "beast paradigm", a powerful entity that can clear regulatory hurdles but lacks the aesthetic sensitivity to plan creativity, rather than a "prince" with the vision to architect a cultural wave (Kim, 2016)

Second, the book's depiction of fandoms as mere "amplifiers" lacks empirical depth regarding their evolving socio-political agency. While the writers identify fans as tools for legitimizing soft power as the grassroots level, contemporary research suggests that fandoms have evolved into sophisticated "referees" who provide the necessary credibility for South

Korea's soft power to take root in foreign territories (Dewi, 2021). These non-state actors are not just passive consumers; they are active "distributors" and "producers" who create their own social bonds and content independent of official government initiatives (Dewi, 2021). This creates a significant dilemma for South Korean cultural diplomacy: while fandom networks extend the nation's reach, they possess an organized agency that can mobilize for global causes, such as racial justice or solidarity for Palestine, which may not always align with Seoul's official foreign policy objectives. The book fails to sufficiently address this tension between state-led branding and the the autonomous, sometimes transgressive, power of global fan communities.

Third, although the authors truthfully highlight the industry's "dark side", the analysis remains descriptive and fails to link these ethical issues causally to the success of the business model. The "dark side" including "slave contracts", "Trainee debt", and intense mental pressure is not an accidental side effect but the functional core of an "assembly-line" production pipeline that reflects a collectivist mindset (Liu, 2024). The exploitation of artists, particularly minors, through rigorous training schedules and toxic beauty standards is the very engine that enables Korean cultural products to maintain extreme global competitiveness and high output (Bhutia & Narvey, 2024; Liu, 2024). The book tends to treat these issues as anomalies to be fixed, rather than acknowledging that the bright and dark sides of Hallyu are fundamentally inseparable aspects of its industrial triumph. Moreover, the transition into Hallyu 3.0 and the emergence of virtual idols through AI technology further complicate these ethical issues, as the industry enters an era of "limitless value generation" that might redefine the concept of creative labor altogether (Liu, 2024). By not grounding the "dark side" in these structural economic realities, the book misses an opportunity to offer a more critical and transformative evaluation of the Hallyu model.

The findings presented in this book have significant implication for our understanding of contemporary cultural diplomacy. It prompts a reflection on the nature of influence, suggesting

that while the state can facilitate cultural branding, the ultimate power resides in organic networks and non-state actors. The transition to Hallyu 3.0 and the emergence of virtual idols through AI technology indicate a new era of "limitless value generation" driven by technological advancements (Liu, 2024). This technological leap requires future research to evaluate how virtuality will redefine the relationship between the artist, the state, and the consumer (Liu, 2024).

Furthermore, the ethical contradictions of the "idol factory" model call for a shift in research focus from descriptive success stories to the sustainability and human rights aspects of cultural industries (Bhutia & Narvey, 2024). Ultimately, the book successfully demonstrates that Hallyu is no longer a passing trend but a powerful historical current that continues to reshape the landscape of Cultural Diplomacy in the 21st century.

## Conclusion

*Diplomasi Gelombang Korea (Hallyu): Aktor, Media dan Dampak* serves as a significant scholarly contribution to the Indonesian discourse on cultural diplomacy. The writers successfully provide a systematic and accessible mapping of the Hallyu ecosystem, bridging the gap between International Relations theory, and the practicalities of contemporary popular culture. The book's strength lies in its ability to present a chronological narrative that is relevant for both students and policymakers.

However, as this review has demonstrated, the book's predominantly state-centric narrative necessitates a critical shift in perspective to avoid oversimplifying the Hallyu phenomenon. To fully understand Hallyu's global longevity, scholars must acknowledge the government's role not as an omnipotent "architect," but as a responsive facilitator that capitalized on organic, unintended successes, or "success without design" (Kim, 2012). Furthermore, the burgeoning autonomy of global fandoms as independent "referees" suggests that soft power is increasingly decentered from the state, posing new challenges to official diplomatic objectives

that the book only begins to touch upon (Dewi, 2021). Most importantly, the global triumph of Hallyu cannot be intellectually or ethically separated from its human costs; the exploitative "assembly-line" model is not an anomaly to be fixed, but the functional engine of its global competitiveness (Liu, 2024; Bhutia & Narvey, 2024).

Ultimately, while the book establishes a solid foundation, it should be treated as a point of departure for more critical research that prioritizes the agency of non-state actors and the ethical sustainability of cultural industries. By establishing this nuanced understanding, we can better appreciate how the popular culture wave has grown into a powerful current that is capable of drastically reshaping the landscape of international relations in the 21st century

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## Book Cover

